

Coins

U.S. Mint giving Santa Claus a bad reputation

By Roger Boye

FOUR CHICAGO youngsters had to settle for a numismatic rain check in their Christmas stockings today due to a miscalculation at the United States Mint.

The four boys, sons of a coin collector, usually receive a proof set and a mint set each year at Christmas. But a few weeks ago, Dad was told that the five mint (uncirculated) sets he ordered wouldn't arrive until January or February.

"I complained to the mint directors about this shoddy service. You pay that money (\$7 a set), and still the kids don't get their sets at Christmas," the collector wrote.

Unfortunately, he and his sons aren't the only persons who will have to wait for their 1977 sets. A U.S. Mint executive has said that demand for 1977 uncirculated sets exceeded production plans; so the mailing of some of the orders will be delayed. Most of the people who will have to wait sent in their orders just before the ordering cutoff date of Oct. 31.

This delay in the mailing of mint sets mars an otherwise improved service record for the U.S. Mint in 1977, the result of changes made in the time periods for ordering the sets. Earlier this year, for example, some collectors reported receiving proof sets within a month of ordering them.

In 1975 and 1976, waits of six months were common.

IF THE NEW MINT director has her way, the 2.5 million collectors on the U.S. Mint's mailing list won't have their addresses given to nongovernmental interests promoting the sale of medals and other so-called collectibles.

Mrs. Stella Hackel, the former Vermont state treasurer whose nomination as director was confirmed by the Senate in November, recently told a congressional committee that the use of the list by an organization or group not part of the U.S. government would be "an unwarranted invasion" of collector privacy.

Her testimony concerned a bill that would authorize the mint to strike medals and sell them at cost to the U.S. Capitol Historical Society, a non-government organization. If the list is released to the society, "a clearly undesirable precedent" would be set; and, therefore, it would be difficult to refuse other requests for the list, she said.

The news is welcomed since release of the list could become a security disaster to collectors who depend on anonymity. And most collectors would not relish the idea of being inundated with mail advertisements for junk medals produced by many of the private mints.